

DIVISION OF SERVICES FOR THE BLIND
BOARD MEETING MINUTES
FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 12, 2008

DSB BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT

Sharon Berry
Lori Hunter
Nola McKinney
Irma Nelson
Dick Walker

EX-OFFICIO MEMBERS PRESENT

Kara Aaron
Jim Hill
Ann Moore

DSB BOARD MEMBERS ABSENT

Angyln Franquemont
James Johnson

EX-OFFICIO MEMBERS ABSENT

Sandy Rowland
Ramona Sangalli

DHS Representative: Steven Jones

Attorney General's Office Representative: Erika Gee

Governor's Office Representative: None

DSB Staff Present: Katy Morris, Coral Virden, Carolyn Holbrook, Jim Pearson, Donna Walker, Tanya VanHouten, Chris McKenzie, Dorothy Brooks, Kandy Cayce, Ginny McWilliams, Lou Talley, Charlie Cain-Davis, Cortney Heslep, Tina Shelby, Francine Crain, Robert Lamb

CALL TO ORDER. Chairman Mrs. Nola McKinney called the meeting to order.

AMENDMENT AND APPROVAL OF AGENDA. Mrs. Sharon Berry motioned that the agenda be amended to move the DSB Director Evaluation to the end of the meeting so the board can go into *executive session* to discuss recommendations of the evaluation committee, and that the agenda be approved as amended. Mr. Dick Walker seconded the motion. ***Motion passed.*** Mrs. McKinney will relate the Evaluation Committee considerations and recommendations and, upon board approval, sign the evaluation.

APPROVAL OF 06/06/08 MINUTES. Motion was made by Ms. Irma Nelson to approve the minutes. Mrs. Berry seconded the motion. ***Motion passed.***

INTRODUCTIONS. All persons in attendance introduced themselves.

DSB DIRECTOR'S REPORT – The Board Chairman introduced Mrs. Katy Morris as the Director of the Division. Mrs. Morris expressed her appreciation to all who were present and thanked everyone for the opportunity to serve as Director.

National Level Issues- On the national level, ***Congress*** is pursuing legislation to improve pedestrian safety related to 'quiet cars', to increase internet access and access to higher education for persons with vision problems. They are also considering proposals on accessible prescription information and identifiable currency. Medicaid coverage of vision-related aids and appliances (comparable to durable medical equipment) is also an issue. The future of the Randolph-Sheppard Vending Program continues to be a national concern, as does the cooperative role of neighboring states in response to a declaration of national emergency in the region.

Sally Mahan, Rehab Assistant in the Fort Smith Office, is to be highly commended for responding immediately when Hurricane Gustav hit the gulf over the Labor Day Weekend. No caseload managers were able to respond, as the VR Counselor was in Yellowstone, and the Rehab Teacher was on a long awaited cruise. Faced with no available public shelter remaining in the Fort Smith area, Sally contacted the appropriate military officials, made arrangements in concert with Field Administrator Donna Walker, and personally transported two individuals with vision problems to other accommodations in Little Rock. Lions World was gracious to work with Sally to shelter one of the individuals and the other made arrangements through a Little Rock church family.

Another major situation having national impact is the status of the Arkansas Administrative Statewide Information System (***AASIS***). SAP, the contractor for the AASIS software, also provides such programs to multiple corporations as well as the states of Pennsylvania and Delaware. The information system originally provided to Arkansas by SAP proved to be inaccessible to persons who are blind and SAP has substituted a new program which it now assures the state is accessible. DSB will be monitoring the progress of its implementation from both a consumer and staff prospective because its success promises to greatly expand opportunities in state government, both here and in other states, for persons who are blind.

State Agency Activities - On a state level, DSB staff continue to work with **Workforce Centers** across the state to assist them in developing centers where truly accessible services can be obtained by persons who are blind or visually impaired. We are also seeing some progress in our efforts to partner with other state agencies involved in **Supported Employment Programs**. DSB has entered into a cooperative agreement with several state agencies to establish a continuum of services for our consumers who have multiple disabilities and require ongoing supportive services to sustain employment. We haven't had a problem in purchasing short term services, but when an entity has to commit for the long run, we have difficulty getting organizations to commit to do that. That is something that was noted in the 2007 Federal Review for DSB and many other state rehab agencies across the nation. RSA is monitoring Arkansas to ensure that we develop a system of service that will support consumers long-term.

Division of Services for the Blind – The Division continues to put in place the changes related to Federal Review. We have added the *final two supervisor* positions recommended, and opened the planned West Memphis office. Mrs. Tanya VanHouten, Field Services Supervisor in the Little Rock metro area, has greatly assisted Mr. Robert Lamb, the new supervisor in eastern Arkansas, in getting the **West Memphis** office set up. Special Thanks also to Ms. Francine Crain and Mrs. Donna Walker for all their hard work. Everything went much more smoothly because they all worked together.

Along with the rest of state government, DSB supervisors are conducting annual **performance evaluations** of staff. We have a lot of staff that are doing very well and a few that are struggling. Confronting non-performance is an issue statewide, but particularly for DSB because of the impact on consumer rehabilitation plans. DHS is providing training to all supervisors on confronting non-performance when necessary. In the area of **homemaker closures**, DSB is seeing good progress. We are expected to reduce such outcomes in order to concentrate on competitive closures. This week we are at 19 percent homemakers as a percent of all successful case closures. Part of this improvement is due to the closer monitoring being done by the area supervisors and the **minutes documenting discussion** and feedback to local office staff, which was another recommendation of RSA. Amongst all this field activity, staff also conducted the Annual Jump Start Summer Program in conjunction with the Arkansas School for the Blind. This year the program had 13 very excited graduates.

DSB has submitted the final draft of the annual **State Plan** for Vocational Rehabilitation and Supported Employment for RSA approval. It was a long hard struggle because of changes in personnel at RSA and different expectations on the structure and content of the final product, but the plan will be much easier to implement and measure for performance.

DSB is also progressing on the ***Faith Based Bridge to Employment*** initiative and posted the Request for Qualifications to all State Independent Living Centers (SILC). The only one that elected to participate was SOURCES out of Fayetteville. The Faith Based Bridge is designed to create a relationship between DSB and Faith Based organizations, using SOURCES as the bridge. SOURCES will provide an opportunity to the faith based organizations to come and meet with them, and bring in representatives from DSB to provide training on job related information for individuals within their respective congregations who are blind or severely visually impaired, particularly those who are also members of minority groups. What we are trying to do is establish a ***situation of trust***. The long-term goal is that, if we can establish trust to provide information only, maybe in two or three years, the Faith Based Groups may be willing to partner with DSB to serve as a (paid) provider of other activities that benefit our consumers at the local level. Some of these services are already being provided sporadically by such groups, but DSB is seeking to establish a system of services.

Best Practices Training has been provided over the summer for Direct Service Staff as part of the succession planning requisites under the state plan. DSB has multiple new staff and in two to three years, will have even more new staff due to retirements. Once we get the feedback from all of these specialty groups we will take that feedback to the statewide meeting and talk about where we are going to go from here. Once we get that input, I want to take the rest of the administrative team, get together with the board and talk about ***strategic planning***, which may require an extra meeting.

Thanks to Mrs. Cortney Browning, along with VR Counselors, Rehab Assistants and numerous other field staff, DSB is again receiving ***Social Security Reimbursement*** payments. So far, receipts over the last 12 months have totaled \$326,000. Mrs. Feona Barnett was also very involved. They are all very much to be congratulated.

We have two basic initiatives going into the ***2009 session*** besides the budget. One is the ***Qualified Blind Apprentice*** (QBA) program. The other is amendment of the Workforce Investment Board Act to formally include the DSB Director. The QBA request includes 15 revolving positions. Candidates would be ***college graduates who are blind***, and who would participate in a thorough orientation and training curriculum provided by DSB to prepare them to be productive state employees from day one. DSB would negotiate with cooperating state agencies under an existing bit of legislation to provide a ***two year paid apprenticeship*** to pre-trained DSB consumers. The first six months, the apprentices would be paid by DSB under OJT, but the final eighteen months of the two year apprenticeship would be paid by the benefitting state agency from salary savings or other non-state funds.

The QBA program legislation will definitely need the board's advocacy because the proposed program is new and affects other state agencies. I expect agencies to hesitate at first, participating only because the law encourages them to do so. However, once the staff of cooperating state agencies see how well prepared the Apprentices are, I am hoping they will come back to DSB asking for more employee placements with that same high level of beginning expertise in state government. Current wording reserves the Apprenticeships to graduates who are blind individuals, basically because it is that same group of individuals who have been unable to gain experience in the AASIS system because it has been inaccessible. However, the legislation can be expanded to accommodate an order of selection of candidates to include *visually impaired individuals*, in the event there are more Apprenticeship opportunities than there are available individuals who are blind.

August 2 -3, DSB staff participated with Licensed Blind Vendors in the *Vendors' Annual Meeting*. The program is down to 20 locations statewide, and is hard hit by the downturn in the economy, both for vendor sales and for locations. In the Tech lab, we are looking to expand the capacity for providing basic technology services outside of Little Rock. In time, we will be *training the rehab teachers to do basic set up and demonstration*. Currently we have 9 Rehab Teachers, including West Memphis and are looking at adding a position in Harrison and El Dorado. As we hire new RTs, we will be looking for people who are more comfortable with computer access, and providing them appropriate training and perhaps some certification in that area.

For the Reading Service, the *move to digital* has caused all kinds of questions. However, it appears that AETN has worked out the solutions. Also, they are completing an equipment upgrade at the Reading Service, so that the hook up with the Democrat-Gazette provides better usage for the telephone reader consumer.

END OF COMMENTS BY DIRECTOR

EMPLOYEE OF THE YEAR COMMITTEE REPORT – Ms. Lori Hunter reported that the committee met, voted and recorded all the nominees. The winner of the clerical category is Ms. Sherrie Walston; a tie actually occurred in the administrative category between Elizabeth Henderson and Ginny McWilliams. In the Direct Services category, the winner is Linda Register. The overall winner is Elizabeth Henderson. Again this year, the committee urged nominators to read the questions of the category that they are completing very carefully and try to be very specific and relevant. Also, they suggested that persons making nominations should get with their nominees to ensure they know their accomplishments.

CONSUMER OF THE YEAR COMMITTEE REPORT – Ms. Lori Hunter reported that the committee has six nominations so far, with nominations closing October 15. The board has stated that each case load will nominate at least one Consumer of the Year. If one is not received from each of the 12 VR caseloads for 2008, we will go ahead with what we have.

COMMISSION TRAINING (State Rehabilitation Councils) – Mrs. Sharon Berry and Mr. Jim Hill attended training recently on the structure, purpose and responsibilities of State Rehabilitation Councils. Mrs. Berry reported that the main reason for the conference was to unveil a new training tool that the National Association of State Rehabilitation Councils is encouraging all State Rehabilitation Councils (governing Boards or Commissions) to go through, test on, and then receive a certificate. She added that people who are serving on a board should go through the training tool so that they will better understand board responsibilities and just how important and intense this really should be. Mrs. Berry also noted that the Board should put together a similar training for new members, and offered to share SRC Training Conference file. Also, members can access information at www.eRehab.org.

2008 NATIONAL CONVENTION REPORTS – Reports regarding the 2008 National Convention of ACB and NFB were submitted with the board packet. Mrs. McKinney expressed her appreciation to the board for allowing her to represent the board at the ACB National Convention and relayed Ms. Hunter's appreciation to the board for allowing her to represent the board at the NFB National Convention.

ANNUAL VOTE ON BOARD EXPENSE REIMBURSEMENT – Ms. Irma Nelson motioned that the board members be reimbursed per state regulations for their costs incurred in attending the board meetings. Mr. Walker seconded the motion. **Motion Passed.**

DISABILITY RIGHTS CENTER REPORT (DRC) – No representative was present.

ARKANSAS INDEPENDENT LIVING COUNCIL REPORT (AILC) - No representative was present. A report was submitted with the board packet.

CONSUMER INPUT - Ms. Lori Hunter reminded participants that the *state NFB convention* is scheduled September 26-27, 2008 at the Holiday Inn Convention Center in Jonesboro. She noted that during NFB National Convention, she had been elected to the board of the Performing Arts Division of NFB, and parties interested in the Division should contact her at 501-362-6776. Ms. Hunter also encouraged individuals to contact their county seat and to ensure the voting machines are up and ready for voters with visual impairment. Mrs. McKinney noted that the 2009 state ACB convention is scheduled to be held again at the LaQuinta Inn at Otter Creek the first week in May.

Mrs. Morris announced that DSB Area Supervisor Mr. Robert Lamb had suggested an ***Advocacy Award*** be created to honor Mr. Hudson. It would be similar to the Employee of the Year Award, and it would be funded by the Pauline Esther Berry Gift and Bequest fund. Mrs. Sharon Berry made a motion to approve creation of an Advocacy Award to be named in honor of Mr. Jim Hudson. Ms. Lori Hunter seconded the motion. **Motion Passed.** Mrs. McKinney appointed Mrs. Berry, Ms. Hunter, Mr. Hill and Ms. Nelson to serve on a committee, along with herself, to develop guidelines for the Jim Hudson Advocacy Award. The Committee will submit recommendations on the guidelines at the December DSB board meeting.

EXECUTIVE SESSION. The board adjourned into executive session to discuss the DSB Director's evaluation. The board reconvened and announced that the evaluation had been approved.

The next regular quarterly board meeting will be held Friday, December 12, 2008, at 1:00 p.m. at the Department of Human Services, Donaghey Plaza South Building, First Floor, Conference Rooms A & B, followed by the reception for the 2008 Consumer of the Year.

The meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully Submitted,

Irma Nelson
Secretary